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Show Me Agriculture

Thanksgiving is Turkey Time!

What do you think about when someone says Thanksgiving? Many people think about turkey, pumpkin pie, sweet potatoes, apple pie and cranberries. Some of these are important agricultural crops produced in Missouri and some are not.

Americans love to eat turkey. In fact, each person in the United States consumes an average of 18 pounds of turkey each year. This means that we eat turkey much more often than just on Thanksgiving Day. So raising turkeys and preparing them for market is a big business in Missouri.

There are different kinds of turkey farmers in Missouri. Some farmers have breeder flocks. Breeder flocks have tom (male) and hen (female) turkeys that produce hatching eggs. The hatching eggs are then taken to a large hatchery where they are incubated. Baby turkeys are called poults and they hatch after 28 days of incubation.

The newly hatched turkey poults are then taken to a farm when they are only one day old. The turkey farmer will have a clean, warm and dry building called a brooder house ready for them. Warm areas kept at a temperature of 95 degrees Fahrenheit will keep the poults comfortable during the first week. The temperature will be slowly decreased over the next several weeks as the poults grow their feathers.

The farmer provides the poults with nutritious feed and clean water at all times. The poults will remain in the brooder house for about six weeks. The farmer will check them many times each day to be sure that they are healthy and have plenty of food and water. Most brooder houses are large and often hold about 12,000 poults.

By the time the poults are six weeks old, they are too large for the brooder house. They are then moved to a larger intermediate house where they will stay for the next five or six weeks. The birds continue to have as much feed as they like and they grow very fast. Soon they are too large for the intermediate house, so they are moved into two large finisher houses. The turkeys will stay in the finisher houses for five or six more weeks until they are the right size.

The farmer keeps careful records about the turkeys. The farmer keeps track of how many birds are in each house and how much feed they are eating. The farmer has to order feed from the feed mill so that the poults will not run out of feed. The farmer is also kept busy making repairs to the equipment in the buildings. When the tur-

keys are grown, the farmer gets up in the middle of the night to watch as workers load large trucks that will take the turkeys to the processing plant that might be many miles away.

